

Deliberations on New Long-Term Program Draw to a Close

On September 29, the 33rd and final meeting was held of the Atomic Energy Commission's panel to draft the new long-term program for nuclear policy, known now as the "fundamental principles for nuclear policy program."

At the meeting, concrete figures and dates were given for the share of nuclear power plants (NPPs) and the dates of FBR introduction, and the basic policies for the reprocessing of spent fuel were outlined. Meanwhile, emphasis was placed on the following issues: (1) the approach taken to address safety and relieve anxiety, (2) coexistence with communities siting nuclear-related facilities, (3) the response to radioactive wastes, and (4) public hearing and public relations (PR) activities.

The Long-Term Program Council first began its proceedings in June 2004, and continued for the subsequent 16 months. In that interval, six sessions were held by the subcommittee to technologically investigate each scenario for the nuclear fuel cycle, with three sessions also held by the working group on international issues. In addition, 21 opinion-gathering sessions were held.

The issue upon which the council spent the most time deliberating was nuclear fuel cycle policy. The members evaluated ten items – safety, technical viability, economy, etc. – for each scenario, including direct disposal, and decided that the basic policy should be reprocessing, reconfirming the propriety of that policy line.

The fundamental principles that were discussed dwelt relatively little on numerical targets, but did mention specific numbers relating to the role of NPPs and the date of FBR introduction. It was stated, "In the pursuit of the best energy supply mix, it would be appropriate to maintain the share for nuclear power generation at the current 30% to 40%, or to boost that percentage." Also, it went on to say, "Premised on economy and other conditions, the target for the introduction of commercial FBRs should be set around the year 2050." Chairman Kondo mentioned, "We will consider the bare minimum necessary to further policies in the future."

For the time being, the MOX-use Program will be steadily promoted. Starting around 2010, then, deliberations will be carried out on technical and other issues concerning the spent fuel in interim storage and the spent MOX fuel.

The draft proposal devoted much space to the issue of coexisting with facility-siting communities, and the approach taken to radwastes was treated as a basic activity serving as a necessary condition preceding nuclear power utilization.

At the final meeting, almost all of the members expressed their agreement with the basic proposal, except for the prominent anti-nuclear activists Hideyuki Ban and Hitoshi Yoshioka, who naturally expressed opposing opinions. The drafting committee decided to include such minority opinions as theirs into the fundamental principles as well. The final shape of the proposal will be determined after the Atomic Energy Commission makes its deliberations.

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